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PRESS RELEASE **24 September 1993**

Xanana Gusmao being treated like a common criminal
2-week hunger strike against removal from East Timor

TAPOL has learnt from reliable sources that Xanana Gusmao, the East Timorese resistance leader who was sentenced in Dili last May, went on a two-week hunger strike in protest at his removal from East Timor and his re-location to a prison for common criminals in Semarang, Central Java. The hunger strike, the only form of protest available to him in his present circumstances, continued until he was too weak to move out of his cell unaided.

In a letter to the British Government today, Carmel Budiardjo of TAPOL said that his forcible removal from East Timor is in violation of the 4th Geneva Convention which prohibits "(I)ndividual or mass forcible transfers, as well as deportations of protected persons from an occupied territory to the territory of the Occupying Power... regardless of their motive." [Paragraph 49] The transfer of East Timorese prisoners from their native land was condemned last month by the UN Sub-Commission on Prevention of Discrimination and Protection of Minorities as a violation of this Convention.

Thirteeen East Timorese political prisoners who were tried and given harsh sentences after the Santa Cruz massacre on 12 November 1991 have all been transferred to prisons in various parts of Indonesia, in Kupang, Mataram (Lombok) and Jakarta, in contravention of the Geneva Convention.

Having ascertained that Kedungpane Prison, Semarang, where Xanana Gusmao is now being held is a prison for convicted criminals, TAPOL also protests against the treatment of Xanana Gusmao as a common criminal.

To make matters worse, before his transfer from Dili, Xanana Gusmao was not permitted to meet his family to say goodbye, even though his sister asked to meet him on the day he was moved. The prison authorities did not even tell her what was about to happen. Now that he is in Java, his chances of meeting them is more remote than ever. He has not met his family since he was sentenced on 21 May.

While Foreign Minister Ali Alatas claims that his government is showing greater openness and will give access to humanitarian and human rights organisations to visit East Timor, the government is perpetrating gross injustices against East Timorese political prisoners. The true nature of its treatment of the East Timorese is being concealed behind a smoke-screen.

TAPOL has called on the British Government to protest strongly to the Indonesian government against this violation of the Geneva Convention. The only way to remedy this latest injustice against Xanana is for him to be released and allowed to return to his native land without delay. All the other prisoners should also be released and returned home.